

# AMBITION.

or, The Heart Overtasked.

by JOHN S. JENKINS.

## CHAPTER I.

The hour was evening. The last lingering rays of sunset fell in a rich flood of silver light over the bright and gorgeous landscape. From every nook and corner of the earth; from the tall dark mountain, the forest of pines and maples, the thicket of the sheltering grove, and the deep glen where the purling brook echoed its gentle murmurs; from the sunny hill-side, the grassy glade, and gay parterre, there came swelling the melody of Nature's unwritten music; that melody which fills the heart to overflowing with gladness; which causes the eye to sparkle, the cheek to glow, the bosom to throb, and the soul to feel that the hand is good which fashioned these things for erring man; that we do not live altogether in vain; and that, despite the petty annoyances which harass and perplex us, there are here ten thousand sources of enjoyment, to which we can always turn when the cares of the world press heavily upon us. It causes us to know in our hearts, that we have a mission to perform, a high behest to fulfil, a destiny, for good or for evil, to accomplish; and it forces from us the often unwilling acknowledgment that in the *far beyond* there is a future life, of which the present is but the hopeful promise!

Beneath the shade of a lofty elm, which reared itself conspicuously on the summit of a verdant knoll, at whose base flowed the clear waters of one of our fairest rivers, and carelessly leaning against its heavy trunk, stood a young man, whose lithe form and easy attitude, gave evidence that he was yet in the fulness and vigor of early manhood. He was not what some would have called handsome; there was but little mere beauty in the high and massive forehead, which, so cold and still in its repose, seemed as if hewn out of the rugged marble; but there was something in the fixedness of his look, and the half-

concealed air of hauteur, which gave his finely chiselled lip the least perceptible curl—in the free expansion of his nostrils, and the swelling of his broad chest, as he inhaled the freshening breeze, that forcibly attracted the attention. Yet no one could have looked on him as he stood there, with his arms folded over his breast, and his pale, stern brow bared to the winds of heaven, which played so wantonly with the long masses of his rich, raven hair, and have failed to observe the wild, fierce play of his features, the lines which thought and passion had traced on his countenance, or the fire of genius which glowed so brightly in his sunken eye. The homage due to a superior intellect would have been involuntarily rendered to him, but as involuntarily succeeded by an emotion of fear—a thrilling fear for one, in whose bosom was evidently pent a slumbering volcano, which, when its dormant fires were once aroused, could only be quenched in the death or destruction of him who cherished it.

“These are indeed beautiful!” he spake in a deep, spirit-like tone, and over his face there passed a glorious flush of enthusiasm—“the handiwork alone of a Power, in whose ineffable presence, we poor, weak mortals, are but as nothing! I love them well—the scenes and voices of my native land! They waken in my breast emotions akin to those the patriot countryman of Tell may feel, as he hears the joyous notes of the *Kühreihen* echoed among the frowning cliffs and dark forests of Unterwalden, or along the banks of the sweet Lucerne. My feet have trodden many a more storied spot, and prouder clime. My hand has brushed the climbing ivy from the Coliseum, and the collected dust of ages from the tombs of the Pharaohs. From the summit of St. Bernard, I have seen the lightning playing beneath my feet; and from the Appenines I have looked down on the wrecks of empires. I have stood upon the heights of the Sierra Morena, and feelings of delight have stolen over me, as I witnessed the graceful movements of the dark-eyed and dark-browed Spanish maidens, when they mingled in the gay Bolero; or listened to the merry sounds of castanet and guitar, rising sweetly from the smiling vallies of Andalusia. From the ‘Bridge of Sighs’—

'A palace and a prison on each hand'—

I have heard the wild improvisations of the happy, light-hearted gondoliers, on the canals of Venice:—yet have I never felt as now! Nor is it wonderful this should be so: I have been where Liberty *was*; I am where Liberty is —where man is free to indulge the high and lofty aspirations of his nature—where genuine merit and sterling intellect give not place to entailed reputation, titled ignorance, or hereditary arrogance. Here are no *privileged* competitors for place and station. All start *equal* —the palm is for the humblest, as well as the proudest—he who wins may wear it! *It is a bright thought*. —that palm may yet be *mine*! It cannot be in vain that I have, owl-like, shut myself out from the world, and buried myself amid the musty relics and philosophic lore of olden time; that I have preferred the companionship of books to the society of the pleasure-seeking crowd; not all in vain that I have wooed science with the ardor and devotion of a lover, and perilled health and happiness to win applause from the many! Are all the imaginings of my boyhood to be but shadows!—and may I never grasp the reality of the bright visions which flit before me in the solitude of my chamber! As for *Rosalie* —ah! there is yet too much of tenderness in that word!—I pity her, from my heart! I pity her! I doubt not the strength or fervor of her affection. My heart is unchanged toward her. She may, I trust, be happy— *with another*! —for, though it rack my brain and wither my heart forever, I will not ask her to be *mine*! Rosalie is dear to me—but Fame is dearer still! Love has been the *Episode* of the past —Ambition shall be the *History* of the future!”

A light footstep sounded near him—a soft hand was gently laid upon his arm—and the sweet voice of her whom he had once loved, deeply and passionately loved, started him from his reverie.

“You here, Clement?—I know not why it was, but I hoped not to find you at our try sting-place. Nay! chide me not,” she continued, half playfully, and half in earnest, as she put her hand to his lips—“a strange fear has seized me today. I have feared that our happiness

was soon to be clouded for ever!"

"Rosalie has ceased to love me?"

"Oh, no!—her love ends only with her life!"

"She doubts me, then?"

"She cannot!—She sees you, and forgetting all, is happy!"

"Between those who love there should be nothing *to forget!* You confide in me or your heart is no longer mine!" he spoke harshly and bitterly.

"Unsay those words—in mercy unsay them! Pain me not by a denial. You wrong me much—indeed you wrong me—I could never prove faithless to the one I love!"

"And yet your hand trembles in my own—your eye regards not mine—you shudder as I look upon you!"

"Speak not harshly to me, Clement! If I shudder, it is only when you frown on me. I have not sought to give offence in look, word, or tone. I cherish no thought of fear for you. I am but a weak, timid girl; no wonder I should sometimes give way to the vague forebodings my imagination will, spite of my better judgment, often conjure up. They have all vanished now in the sunlight of your presence; and if you but smile on me, I ask no other joy—I know no other happiness! Rosalie loves not idly—she is all, *all your own!* "—and the warm-hearted, high-souled maiden, in her unselfish abandonment to the love she bore for him who would have vexed and slighted her, threw herself into his arms, and sobbed long and loudly.

For one moment Clement Lee was the lover. Large, burning tears dimmed his eye; his bosom throbbed madly and wildly, as he felt that warm, confiding heart, beating against his own; and, while he pressed

her fondly to his breast, he murmured in those accents she dearly loved to hear—“*Rosalie — I love thee* ” That answering emotion was but evanescent. His whole soul was bent on one object, and he hesitated not to thrust aside every thing which interfered with its attainment.

His mind was wrought up to the determination of taking one decided step, and he faltered not in his resolve. A shadow passed over his countenance—his lips were joined firmly together—and he was again the cold, scheming, ambitious man, ready to venture all on the high stake for which he played.

But for the tender one who hung on his neck—she knew not that he had already changed toward her—she had only heard those glad words which spoke peace to her troubled heart, and those sweet tones of affection to which she had listened with so much rapture in hours that were past; and with a brow of light, and a cheek tinged with the rich vermil of her mantling blush, she raised those soft, gazelle-like eyes, glistening with tears, all too fondly trusting that the smile of joy would once more greet and bless her. That smile rewarded not her devotion; a withering frown fell darkly upon her, and sent back the warm life-blood chilled to her heart. Her cheek was blanched to a deadly whiteness; her frame trembled like the young aspen; and her voice was choked and hollow as she wildly uttered:

“Clement, you are ill!—You look strangely! Your hand is cold, and your brow hot and feverish! My heart tells me you are ill—forgive me that I spake unkindly—let me be your physician—I will, heaven knows I will, gladly minister to you!”

“I know you would—but it is useless! My illness was only momentary, and I am calmer, firmer, now!” He took her hand in his as he concluded, with a strange and unwonted energy, and in a broken and hurried tone —“*Rosalie—dost thou love me?*”

“And can you doubt it?” she spake warmly and enthusiastically—

“Have I not often told you how fondly and sincerely I love you? I have kept nothing back from you; I have given you my heart wholly and forever—over that heart yours’ is ‘no divided empire’— I live and breathe but in your presence. With you I am most happy—away from you I can be but miserable. My love is not of hasty growth—it has been fostered for years. It is a part of my nature, and I could not live without it! No vestal ever cherished with more unceasing devotion the fires which glowed in the temple of her worship, than have I, that flame which burns so brightly and so intensely on the altar of my heart: the Hindoo maiden may, it is true, watch long and well the taper-light of love and hope, as her incense-freighted bark is borne down the waters of the Ganges; but her love is clouded with the dark rites of superstition—mine has a more sacred, a more hallowed origin! It springs from the purest and holiest impulses of woman’s character; and it brings her nearer to life, and light, and happiness, and heaven!”

“Tell me not this!” he passionately uttered, “I cannot bear it. There is madness in the thought that such love should ever meet with disappointment! Say only that you love me, and would see me prosperous, fortunate, and happy!”

“Indeed I would? How could I wish to see you otherwise?—is not your happiness mine own?”

“You will listen to me, then, when I tell you—start not, for I speak soberly and seriously, though sadly— *this must be our last meeting!*”

“Surely, Clement, you jest with me—you would not wrong me thus,” and she clung fondly to his arm, “you cannot be so cruel! Why should we *never* meet again? Is there aught should make us blush, or fear, to own our love?”

“I jest not, Rosalie!—never spake I truer word. Love is to me like the tree in the garden; I am forbidden to taste of its fruit! I have placed my hopes upon a prize more valued than the wealth of untold mines, I despise the world, and condemn its cold selfishness, its hollow

heartedness, and its base servility; yet would I have it fawn upon and flatter me. I would gain a name among men; I would hear my praise on their lips, and see them awed and abashed in my presence. Long, long years, must pass ere this can be: thought, soul, mind, body, every thing, must be directed to this end. My heart will not acknowledge fealty to two masters; it serves but one; it follows only one! I have not time to love; another destiny is before me—a brighter, and it may be...”

“*Happier?* would’st thou say? No; believe me, Clement Lee, it is but an empty bubble which you would grasp; it has lured many a one to misery and bitterness! Beware how you trample on the heart that loves you!”

“Hear me, Rosalie, hear me!—I cannot love you if I would—henceforth we can be only as *friends* —we part *forever!* —and wilt thou not say me farewell?”

“I may not—I could not speak that word—not even to ju who cast me from you as a thing of little worth! The time shall come when you will repent that you had trifled with the love I gave you—but you will not leave me?—say that you will not, and I will forget that you had thought to part from me—oh! say it, and I will pray for you—I will bless you—aye, worship you!”

Long and earnestly she pleaded. By all his hopes of happiness in this world, and peace in another, she besought him not to leave her thus. By the memory of the many happy hours they had spent together; by the vows they had plighted to each other, she implored him not to slight her love. She did not upbraid him—no word of reproach passed her lips. She would follow him through the world; make any sacrifice for his sake; be his, and his only, through weal and through woe. In sickness she would watch over him; in adversity she would comfort him; in prosperity she would’ rejoice with him. She would not be a burthen to him; she would work for him—toil for him—and be happy, so that he gave her one tender word, or one approving smile!

Her entreaties moved him not; his resolution could not be shaken. With a sudden effort, he tore himself from her, and murmuring a parting benediction in her ear, he left her—heart-stricken--desolate!

Slowly, though surely, the conviction that she was deserted, fastened itself upon her mind. She knew that she was alone—still she could not curse the destroyer of her peace. She felt, oh, how keenly! the bitterness of unrequited love—yet she repined not. It was hard for her to feel that she had “loved not wisely, but too well;” nevertheless, she bowed in submission to the stroke which had visited her. Bitter and many were the tears she shed.

“Big, bright, and fast, unknown to her they fell—  
But still her lips refused to send ‘farewell!’ ”

From that hour Rosalie Herbert was a changed woman—the barbed arrow had penetrated deep into her soul —*she never smiled again!*

## CHAPTER II.

Receiving upon a splendid ottoman, in a chamber whose tapestried hangings, and the rich paintings on its walls, bespoke the opulence and taste which in our own sunny clime have reared villas, that may well vie in beauty with those which are interspersed among the vineyards and olive-groves of the far-famed vale of Arno, lay the form of a fair invalid. Through the open casements, “half-hidden by clematis and rose,” came the evening breeze, laden with the fragrance of the magnolia and the orange. The music of the water plashing in the fountain, was enlivening and refreshing; and the soft notes of the nightingale fell on the ear like the remembered voice of an early friend. Vases of flowers, both native and exotic, filled the apartment with perfume. In One corner stood an unstrung harp—silent and listless as that «which hung in Taras’ hall the soul which had once animated it, no longer woke from its strings the wild and unpassioned strains of the Tyrol, or the softer numbers of the lays of



Provence. The toilet of rose-wood was richly inlaid with mother of pearl, and decorated with Psyche glasses, and costly ornaments of Sevre's China. Books, poetry, and music were scattered profusely over the marble table which occupied the centre of the room:—yet were all these (to most persons, evidences of happiness and contentment) unheeded by the stricken maiden on whom sickness had laid its hand so heavily. They brought no smile upon her countenance; no hue of health flushed the fall cheek now rivalling the unsunned snow in whiteness and purity. Her long, glossy ringlets hung listlessly over her moistened brow, and the pale jewelled hand which seemed scarce able to sustain the weight of the head it supported. Her eyes were large and lustrous, and the veined lids partially closed over them, as if to shut out their unearthly beauty. Her form was strangely attenuated; and no one would have readily recognized there, the fair proportions which had charmed so many eyes, and won so many hearts in the happier hours that had smiled on Rosalie Herbert.

Five years had gone by since she had parted from Clement Lee—five years, in which had been concentrated to her, the misery and woe of ages. For a time she had proudly and nobly endeavored to bear up against her fate. It was fruitless all. Her love had grown with her growth, and had become too deeply rooted ever to be eradicated. It was a part—nay, the *better* part of her existence—life had no charms without it.

“Pierced, they might disjoin them;  
But perfect, *never!*”

She saw her hopes prostrated, her affections crushed, and the fond desires of her heart blighted at once and forever. Danger, care, trouble, penury and misfortune, she could have borne; the world might have mocked at her truth, and sneered at her devotion; no matter, they would have been “like the idle wind which she regarded not” She would have felt amply repaid for any suffering, any reproach, if the star of love had rested over and lighted her path. No obstacles would

have dismayed —no dangers daunted her, had she only been assured that there was one being in the wide world who appreciated and returned her affection. But he on whom she had trusted with such firm and implicit reliance, had deserted her. Disappointment, bitter, unyielding disappointment, was her portion. The future, once all joy and sunshine, presented but a dark and gloomy vista. She had nothing left to live for—nothing to hope for— one thing, and one alone, to die for—and that embraced her all of felicity, both here and hereafter—for it was *Peace!*

“Clara—sister!” her voice was low and plaintive as that of the dying zephyr, and the person whom she addressed, a young and beautiful, though care-worn female, sprang hastily from the embrasure of the window in which she had been seated—“I cannot—I dare not —sleep. These wild dreams haunt my fancy, and disturb my mind. Grim monsters start, up ever and anon before me; and tall, sheeted spectres point their long, bony fingers at me in scorn! Oh! it is horrible— dreadful—that fearful shudder!”

“Rosalie? ”

“Who calls ‘Rosalie?’—it is a forbidden word.”

“Say not so!—Do we not all love you dearly?” and the speaker bent over her sister’s form, and imprinted a warm kiss on her pale cheek—“You know not how gladly we would see you once more well and happy!”

“I do know it—I feel it!—but I fear me I shall never live to requite your kindness! Do I speak wildly? My brain is hot—scorching hot—and my throat is parched with thirst!”

“Drink of this goblet—it will revive you. You need rest—compose yourself!”

“The letter, Clara!—has it been sent?”

“It has!”

“And is there no answer!”

“The messenger has not returned. Clement Lee has been successful in the canvass—and he is to address his fellow-citizens this evening; perhaps he...”

“No! no! He cannot refuse me—it is a last request—I have told him so. He knows that I am dying, and he will come—I am sure he will!”

“Talk not of dying, Rosalie, we cannot part with you!”

“Why should I not? it is but truth! Like the flower plucked from its parent stem, and deprived of the quickening influence of sunlight and shower, I am fast fading away. The hand of death is on me, I feel it *here!*” she pressed her hand emphatically to her heart.

“Oh, no! You are better—much better now—the bloom again freshens on your cheek!”

“Ah! you must not deceive me!” she said, raising her head faintly, and surveying her reflected image in the pier-glass before her. “‘T is the startling premonition of the last change—the seal of the destroyer! Gaily he decks his victims for the sacrifice—ha! this *is* the ‘bloom’ of the grave!”

Overpowered with the effort, she sank back into the arms of her sister, and for a few moments lay motionless and senseless as a statue. Suddenly her eyes were opened—she missed some one, and murmured softly,

“My mother? where is she?”

“Here, Rosalie!” said the mother, as she entered the room. “Cheer up,

love! here is a message for you; Clement Lee is engaged with his friends tonight, he will call tomorrow.”

“A ‘message?’ then indeed he has forgotten me! ‘tomorrow?’ that will be too late! Be still, still, my poor heart!” she exclaimed. “I could bear all—all— but this! to know he would not see me, even now Do not weep, my mother! Come near me, speak to me, pray for me!”

Thus entreated, she knelt beside her child, and though the sobs she could not suppress, almost impeded her speech, she poured forth at the throne of grace, the petition of a heart overflowing with gratitude, yet rent by the keenest and most poignant anguish. She had just concluded as the words—“*mother — sister—Clement —Heaven!*” came faintly articulated from the lips of Rosalie. A feeble smile lighted up the countenance of the dying girl—her eyes sparkled with, a supernatural brightness—n gentle tremor stole over her frame—and, lovely even in death, she passed “like the anthem of a breeze away!”

The gifted and the beautiful, whom no one hated, and on whose head old and young hourly invoked the blessings of heaven to descend; whose step was light as the young fawn’s on the green turf; whose merry laugh once rang so joyously amid the old trees which grew around the home of her fathers, and whose voice was musical as the tones of the wind-harp, at length slept that sleep which knows no waking, this side the untried hereafter!

The fortunes of Clement Lee had all been bright and prosperous. Untiring zeal, care, labor, and incessant devotion of time, had raised him to the front rank in his profession. His hopes were fulfilled, his wishes gratified—he had won his way to distinction I Profoundly versed in the attainments of science, deeply read in the blackletter of the law, talented, accomplished, and, withal, possessing that commanding eloquence which never fails to arrest attention and compel conviction, he could not but secure a strong hold upon the affections of his fellow-citizens. His society was courted by the gay and the noble; and they were proud of him—proud of his talents and

his growing reputation. They respected him, for, honorable and just in all his dealings, and stern and inflexible in the cause of right, envy dared not malign, nor calumny assail him. They revered him, because, to all outward seeming, he was the friend of justice, virtue, and morality. They' worshipped him for the burning and thrilling words which hung on his lips, and the genius which kindled in his eye, or sat enthroned in its god-like, majesty on his brow. Their suffrages were gladly bestowed on him, when he appeared before them as a candidate at the hustings; and their shouts of triumph were loud and cheering, when the contest was decided in his favor, and he was returned as their representative in the councils of the nation.

*Was he happy?* He would have said so, as he sat alone at midnight, in the privacy of his study, surrounded to the treasured volumes, from whose pages he had gathered the knowledge which men wondered at and .admired. The arrangement of the books in their mahogany cases was admirable; marble statues and antique busts were placed around the apartment with the taste of a connoisseur. A pair of fencing foils and masks hung over the mantel; and from the ceiling depended an argand lamp, which threw a soft and mellow light over his wide, expansive forehead, as he sat beneath it, almost buried in the cushions of a highbacked, old-fashioned arm-chair, apparently intent on the volume of Rochefoucault he was perusing. On the table before him, amid numerous manuscripts, and fanciful ink-fountains, and paper oases, was a collection which might furnish an index to the character of his studies, and the bent of his mind. Poets and philosophers, divines and scoffers, monarchists and republicans, appeared to have forgotten the warfare they have waged against each other since the foundation of the world. Massillon and Voltaire lay together as cozily as brethren; Bulwer and Schiller, Byron and Shelley, were carelessly thrown side by side with Montesquieu and Bentham, Junius and Jefferson.

“There is little consolation here I—it is bitter as the waters of Marah!”—he threw the book from him in disgust—“I would that I had seen Rosalie tonight— ’she says she is very ill! It may be a trick of

her's to bring me to her—peradventure she is still anxious for an alliance with me—but I will not believe it!—she was ever true, and good, and pure!” He sat for a moment in deep thought, and then continued—“I have a strange presentiment of ill!—why is it I My nerves are firm—my pulse beats regularly—I feel no pain! It cannot be that now when I am nearly happy, when fortune smiles on me so kindly, and the path of honor and preferment lies open before me, the star of my destiny is to set for ever! Must mine be the fate of yon meteor, which illumined the deep azure of heaven for a moment, and then vanished in the darkness of midnight! Shall earth's fruits always turn to ashes in my mouth! ’ Now, when the prize for which I have so long panted is within my reach, shall I be compelled to resign it! Rosalie may yet be mine—I love her, why may I not one day be happy in that love! It is idle to doubt it— these thoughts are foolish—I will drive them from me,” thus speaking, he rose and advanced to the beaufet at the side of the room, and after tossing off a copious libation from one of the curiously-wrought decanters which stood upon it, he slowly paced across the floor.

A light knock at the door interrupted his walk, and a servant, with a note in his hand, entered at his bidding. There was no mistaking the contents of that dark-edged paper—Clement Lee eagerly caught and opened it. Had an adder stung him he could not have started more wildly than when one word, one fatal word, met his eye—“*Rosalie!* — oh! my God—the fame for which I have so madly striven is at length won—but *all beside, is lost!* Is this— *death?* The servant hastened forward as he was falling, and received him in his extended arms. The sufferer gave one deep groan —the blood gushed from his mouth and choked his utterance—he shuddered convulsively—his features relaxed—and he was—dead!

With all his faults and follies, his virtues and his crimes—for it cannot be less than crime, to wrong the high and holy love of woman—Clement Lee stood before his Maker!

AMBITION!—thou art a fearful master!

THE LADY'S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.